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ACTION ARA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-08	ACDE-00	DODE-00	DOEE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00
	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01	L-01	ADS-00	NSAE-00
	NSCE-00	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	P-00
	CIO-00	SP-00	TRSE-00	T-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	DRL-04
	G-00	FDIC-01	SAS-00	/019W			

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R 122010Z MAY 98  
 FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0614  
 INFO USIA WASHDC 1555  
 CIA WASHDC  
 DIA WASHDC  
 USIA WASHDC 1556  
 USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
 USDOC WASHDC 2838  
 AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
 AMEMBASSY LIMA  
 AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN  
 AMEMBASSY BRASILIA  
 AMEMBASSY QUITO  
 AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

P6016  
 R90  
 RELEASED IN PART  
 B6

CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001447

E.O. 12958: DECLASS: 05/11/08  
 TAGS: PGOV, VE  
 SUBJECT: MAJOR PARTIES ADVANCE EFFORTS TO SPLIT ELECTIONS DESPITE  
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CARACAS 01 OF 02 1447

CRITICAL NATIONAL ELECTION COUNCIL REPORT

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 REASON 1.5(B)

B6.

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SUMMARY  
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1. (U) THE SENATE PASSED MAY 7 AMENDMENTS TO THE ELECTORAL LAW WHICH WILL SEPARATE REGIONAL AND NATIONAL ELECTIONS, AND MOVE THE REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS FORWARD TO NOVEMBER. THIS CONTROVERSIAL VOTE, WHICH PROVOKED THE WALKOUT FROM THE SENATE OF ALL PARTIES EXCEPT THE DEMOCRATIC ACTION (AD) AND SOCIAL CHRISTIAN (COPEI) PARTIES, SENDS THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES FOR FINAL APPROVAL. THE SENATE VOTE CAME IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL (CNE) ISSUED A TECHNICAL REPORT RECOMMENDING AGAINST ADVANCING THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS. THE AMENDMENTS, WHICH WERE CARRIED ON THE STRENGTH OF A JOINT AD-COPEI MAJORITY IN THE SENATE, ARE DESIGNED TO ELIMINATE THE COATTAILS EFFECT ON REGIONAL ELECTIONS OF THE DECEMBER PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, LOCK IN AD AND COPEI GOVERNORS AND MAYORS, AND DEAL A SIGNIFICANT DEFEAT AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL TO HUGO CHAVEZ. THE VOTE WAS ROUNDLY CRITICIZED BY THE CHAVEZ-LINKED HOMELAND FOR ALL PARTY (PPT) AS A "BLOODLESS COUP," AND BY OTHER SMALLER PARTIES AS AN AD-COPEI POWER PLAY. THE CONTROVERSY GENERATED BY THIS ISSUE WILL INCREASE AS AD AND COPEI, WHICH DO NOT HAVE A SHARED MAJORITY IN THE CHAMBER, SEEK TO OBTAIN THE VOTES NECESSARY FOR PASSAGE OF THE AMENDMENTS. END SUMMARY.

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PARTIES MANUEVER TO SPLIT ELECTIONS: ADVANCE OR DELAY?  
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
 REVIEW AUTHORITY: ADOLPH H EISNER  
 DATE/CASE ID: 13 NOV 2009 200503654

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2. (U) DEBATE ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT TO SPLIT THE ELECTIONS FIRST BEGAN TO SURFACE ABOUT THREE MONTHS AGO SHORTLY BEFORE THE INSTALLATION OF THE NEW CNE. INITIAL DISCUSSIONS STRESSED THAT THE UPCOMING DECEMBER ELECTIONS WERE GOING TO BE EXTREMELY COMPLEX SINCE OVER SIX THOUSAND SEATS AT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT ARE UP FOR GRABS. EACH BALLOT -- MUNICIPAL, REGIONAL, CONGRESSIONAL, AND PRESIDENTIAL -- COULD POTENTIALLY HAVE SEVERAL DOZEN CANDIDATES CONFRONTING VOTERS WITH A BEWILDERING SET OF CHOICES.

3. (U) INDEPENDENT PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES IRENE SAEZ AND HUGO CHAVEZ WERE THE FIRST CANDIDATES TO ENDORSE THE IDEA SEPARATING THE REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS AWAY FROM THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS. BOTH SAEZ AND CHAVEZ PROPOSED DELAYING THE REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS UNTIL AFTER THE DECEMBER BALLOT. LATER, SEVERAL OF THE SMALLER PARTIES -- MOVEMENT TOWARD SOCIALISM (MAS), RADICAL CAUSE (LCR), RENOVATION, AND PPT -- ENDORSED THE CONCEPT AS WELL. SUPPORTERS OF DELAYING THE ELECTIONS ASSERTED THAT DOING SO WOULD STRENGTHEN THE DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS, GREATLY SIMPLIFY THE ACTUAL VOTING PROCESS, AND ALLOW AN EXHAUSTED ELECTORATE TO RECOVER FROM THE CONGRESSIONAL AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS.

4. (C) AD AND COPEI INITIALLY OPPOSED SEPARATING THE ELECTIONS, ARGUING THAT PUSHING BACK THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS WAS A TRICK DESIGNED TO GIVE THE SMALLER PARTIES MORE TIME TO ORGANIZE AND TO ALLOW THE NEWLY-ELECTED PRESIDENT THE OPPORTUNITY TO BRING HIS OR HER POWER TO BEAR IN FAVOR OF HIS OR HER REGIONAL CANDIDATES. WHEN PROPONENTS OF SEPARATING THE ELECTIONS INSISTED, AD AND COPEI PROPOSED THAT THE SEPARATION BE ACCOMPLISHED BY ADVANCING THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS TO NOVEMBER. PUBLICLY, SUPPORTERS OF ADVANCING THE REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ARGUED THAT IT WOULD STRENGTHEN THE DECENTRALIZATION PROCESS MORE BY PLACING THESE ELECTIONS BEFORE THE PRESIDENTIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS. PRIVATELY, THEY ARGUED THAT AD AND COPEI HAVE EXTENSIVE PARTY MACHINES AND THE ABILITY TO PUT FORTH CANDIDATES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. ADVANCING THE ELECTIONS WOULD GIVE AD AND COPEI AN EDGE IN REGIONAL ELECTIONS. ONE AD INSIDER TOLD US THAT AD BELIEVES IT CAN SECURE 65 PERCENT OF THE REGIONAL VOTE.

5. (U) ON APRIL 22, PRESIDENT OF THE CONGRESS PEDRO PABLO AGUILAR, A COPEI SENATOR AND PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, ASKED CNE TO EVALUATE THE TECHNICAL FEASIBILITY OF ADVANCING THE REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL POLLS. THE QUESTION OF THE FEASIBILITY OF DELAYING THESE ELECTIONS WAS NOT PLACED BEFORE THE CNE. THE FINAL DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO ADVANCE THE ELECTIONS CAN ONLY BE MADE BY CONGRESS WHICH MUST AMEND THE ELECTORAL LAW.

6. (U) ON THE SAME DAY, MAY 6, THAT THE CNE WAS DELIBERATING ABOUT ITS FINAL DECISION ON THE FEASIBILITY OF ADVANCING OF THE REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, AGUILAR INTRODUCED A BILL TO AMEND THE ELECTORAL LAW TO PERMIT THE SAME ADVANCING. THE NEXT

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## CRITICAL NATIONAL ELECTION COUNCIL REPORT

DAY, ON MAY 7, THE SENATE APPROVED ON ITS FIRST READING THE NECESSARY AMENDMENTS TO THE ELECTORAL LAW. AD AND COPEI SENATORS VOTED UNANIMOUSLY FOR PASSAGE AFTER SIX HOURS OF DEBATE WHICH CULMINATED IN THE WALK-OUT OF PPT, MAS, AND LCR SENATORS. CONVERGENCE ABANDONED ITS EARLIER ANNOUNCED ALLIANCE WITH AD AND COPEI, AND CALLED FOR DELAYING THE REGIONAL THE SECOND TRIMESTER OF 1999.

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CNE: "INCONVENIENT" TO ADVANCE THE REGIONAL ELECTIONS  
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7. (U) THE CNE'S TECHNICAL FEASIBILITY REPORT DECLARES THAT IT IS "INCONVENIENT" TO SPLIT THE ELECTIONS ADVANCING REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS TO NOVEMBER 8. THE UNANIMOUS CNE DECISION WAS ANNOUNCED AFTER 10 HOURS OF DELIBERATIONS IN THE COUNCIL. ALL ELECTIONS -- NATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND MUNICIPAL -- ARE CURRENTLY SCHEDULED TO TAKE PLACE THE FIRST WEEK OF DECEMBER. ON APRIL 22, THE CONGRESS REQUESTED THE CNE TO EVALUATE THE POSSIBILITY OF ADVANCING THE REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS TO THE FIRST WEEK OF NOVEMBER.

8. (U) IN ITS REPORT, THE CNE ASSERTED THAT IT IS NOT FEASIBLE TO ADVANCE THE ELECTIONS FOR TWO REASONS. FIRST, THE CNE INDICATED THAT IT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO IMPLEMENT THE "AUTOMATIZATION" PLAN IN TIME FOR THE PROPOSED NOVEMBER ELECTIONS. SECOND, THE CNE REPORT STATED THAT THE COMPLEXITY IN SELECTING THE MEMBERS OF THE ELECTION BOARDS, THE MUNICIPAL BOARDS, AND THE POLLING STATIONS MAKES IT EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO HOLD ELECTIONS IN NOVEMBER. THE REPORT DOES WARN, "IT WILL BE POSSIBLE TO HOLD SEPARATE ELECTIONS . . . (ONLY) IF THE AMENDMENT TO THE SUFFRAGE LAW IS PASSED, ENACTED, AND IMPLEMENTED BY JUNE 30, 1998." FINALLY, THE REPORT WARNS THAT AN ADDITIONAL 70.85 BILLION BOLIVARS (USD 13,193,668 AT THE CURRENT EXCHANGE RATE) WILL BE NECESSARY TO PAY FOR SEPARATE ELECTIONS.

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COMMENT  
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9. (C) ALL OF THE PARTIES AND CANDIDATES ARE GUILTY OF PLAYING POLITICS WITH THE ISSUE OF WHETHER OR NOT TO SEPARATE THE ELECTIONS. ULTIMATELY, THE MANEUVER TO SPLIT THE ELECTIONS BY ADVANCING THE REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IS AN EFFORT BY THE TWO DOMINANT PARTIES IN VENEZUELAN POLITICS -- AD AND COPEI. THE NEAR-TERM GOAL OF THIS MOVE IS TO HAND CHAVEZ A SERIOUS DEFEAT BEFORE THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS, WHILE SECURING CONTROL OVER THE REGIONS AND MUNICIPALITIES FOR THE LONG-TERM. AS EXPECTED, THE SMALL PARTIES -- PPT, MAS, AND LCR -- HAVE FIERCELY OPPOSED EFFORTS WITHIN THE CONGRESS TO ADVANCE THE REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. THE CONTROVERSY THIS ISSUE HAS PROVOKED WILL INCREASE AS THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES CONSIDERS AMENDMENTS. AD AND COPEI DO NOT HAVE A SHARED MAJORITY IN THE CHAMBER, AND WILL REQUIRE BETWEEN 5 AND 10 VOTES FROM INDEPENDENTS OR OTHER PARTIES. CONVERGENCE HAD OFFERED ITS SUPPORT, BUT THEN WITHDREW IT. PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER IXORA ROJAS, AN AD MEMBER, TOLD US MAY 11, "WE DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH VOTES YET, BUT WE WILL GET THEM." END COMMENT.

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